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**EASTIN SAYS LATEST NAEP RESULTS SHOW NEED FOR STATEWIDE
FOCUS ON WRITING**

SACRAMENTO--“Results of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for writing at grade 8 underscore the need for a much stronger statewide focus on writing,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin. “Students must be able to express themselves effectively to be prepared for higher education, the job market, and citizenship in a democracy. In the Information Age, communication is basic to all human enterprises.”

In her response to today’s release of NAEP national and state-by-state writing scores by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, Eastin reiterated her commitment to improving the writing abilities of all students in California’s public schools. “Reading and writing are interdependent and essential for success in a high-tech society,” said Eastin.

“Unfortunately, our mandatory STAR (Statewide Testing and Reporting) program currently includes only multiple choice questions. This failure to include at least a writing sample spills over into the classroom where teachers may feel pressured to ‘teach to the test.’ We need an assessment of writing other than NAEP. Since the NAEP test was given to only a tiny fraction of our student base, it would make sense to provide a writing examination for all of our state’s students within the STAR program.”

In 1998, NAEP administered a writing assessment to a national sample of students at grades 4, 8, and 10 and to state samples of students in grade 8 in the 40 states participating in the assessment.

NAEP stresses that results are estimates because they are based on samples of students and schools rather than on complete student populations. In California, a sample of 2,157 grade 8 students from 88 schools participated in the writing assessment. Federal

law does not allow the release of the names of districts, schools, or students that participated.

The NAEP writing assessment measured student performance on three types of writing: narrative, informative, and persuasive. Student responses were evaluated as first-draft writing. In the state samples, students were asked to respond to two 25-minute prompts.

Results of student performances were reported in two ways: by scale score and by achievement levels (see attachments). (The term, scale score, is a measure used by testing developers for the purpose of creating comparable scores.)

California's average grade 8 writing score was 141, which is six points below the national average. The report showed 12 states scoring above California, 19 scoring about the same, and seven scoring lower.

NAEP included students with disabilities and students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) in its samples. California had six times more LEP students than the national sample as a whole – 18 percent versus three percent nationally.

Eastin said, "California public schools are testing far more LEP students in English than the national average, and our results reflect that reality."

Achievement levels for NAEP—"basic," "proficient," and "advanced"—are set by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). These three categories implicitly define a fourth one of "below basic." The achievement levels indicate to what extent students mastered the NAEP content set for their grade levels.

Looking at the scores for all students tested, 76 percent achieved at or above "basic" in California, compared to the 83 percent at the national level. In California, 20 percent of students were at the "proficient" level or above, compared to 24 percent nationally.

NAEP results also were reported for various subgroups of students. Subgroup results were reported by gender, race/ethnicity, parental education, region, type of location, eligibility for free/reduced price lunch, and type of school. These subgroup scores show a more complex picture in California (see attachments). A review of subgroup results show many California students performing at or above their comparable

national groups including: white, black, and Asian students and students whose parents attend college or received a college degree.

“One exception is our Hispanic students who did not fare as well,” Eastin said. “This is consistent with what we learned from results of the statewide administration of the Stanford 9 test. Focusing on the educational needs of our Hispanic students clearly must be a high priority.”

Eastin cautioned Californians to consider that our children are: living in a state where multiple choice exams are the only required statewide tests; much more likely than the national sample to speak a language other than English at home; and more likely to be poor. California is a high cost state that spends well below the national average on education.

“To improve writing takes smaller class sizes and prepared teachers where writing is practiced and assessed and a statewide testing system evaluates a student’s writing skills,” said Eastin. “As I’ve often said, ‘What gets measured is what gets done.’”

The 1998 writing assessment is considered a baseline year by NAEP, due to significant changes in test format and scoring procedures from the 1992 writing assessment.

NAEP is administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education with oversight by NAGB. NAEP has assessed many academic subjects since it began in 1969, including mathematics, science, reading, writing, world geography, U.S. history, civics, social studies, and the arts. The 1998 NAEP assessment also included reading and civics. Reading results for grades 4 and 8 were reported in March 1999. National results for civics, tested at grades 4, 8, and 12, will be reported later this fall. In 2000, NAEP will administer assessments in mathematics and science at grades 4 and 8.

The full text of the NAEP 1998 Writing Report Card, along with separate reports for each of the participating states and jurisdictions, can be accessed and downloaded from the NAEP Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

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